

# Ethnonyms in Toponyms of the 17th-19th Century Vidzeme (Latvia)

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## Abstract

Textual material of the historical revisions and church metrics books is an important source of toponymic research. The article is an analysis of house names found in ‘soul revisions’ of 1826.

The first to be mentioned is the self-denomination of Latvians appearing only in the German form *Lette*. Names of several Baltic tribes: the Selonians – *sehlisch, sehlet*, the Cours – *kursen, kurfet, kurfeet*, have become house names.

Farmstead names reflect an even wider representation of Lithuanian self-denominations *leitis* and *lietuviētis* – *leisch, leite, leithan; leetweet, letowet*. House names formally representing self-denomination of Prussians – *prus, prusche* can also be found.

Finno-Ugric elements are essentially represented in house names. Place names with the ethnonym *igaunis* ‘Estonian’ have been recorded – *igaun, iggaun*, with the ethnonym *libietis, libis, līvs* ‘Liv’ – *libesch, lihbet, lihbeet, lihbez, lihwe, liwe*. Possible variants are house names with denominations of the Wots or *krieviņi* – *kreewin, kreewing*.

Some house names comprise denominations of Slavic nations: *krievs* ‘Russian’ – *kreewe, krewe, kreewuppe, polis* ‘Pole’ – *pohle*, with the root *slav- / slāv-* – *slahwit, slavīt, slawischan, slawek*.

The house name *Swedre* bears similarity with the ethnonym *zviēdri* ‘Swedes’, house names *turzing* and *greeke* could probably be linked to ethnonyms *turks* ‘Turk’ and *griekis* ‘Greek’.

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Textual material of the historical revisions and church metrics books is an important source of toponymic research. A copious revision material of ploughs and the church metrics books is available in the archives of Latvia. The oldest revision material of ploughs made up only in some parts of the Vidzeme region dates back from 1631; possibly, not all the materials have survived. A broader revision material of ploughs is that of the year 1638 in the Vidzeme region published in the 1940s. The oldest church metrics books in some mansions date back to 1782, but the materials have been compiled systematically from 1816 and/or 1826. A more detailed analysis of the ethnonyms in the church metrics lists of the Vidzeme gubernia (province) in 1826 will be done on the basis of the Latvian State Historical Archives – the materials of the fund No. 199. These church metrics lists include about 14,500 house names out of which 150 are possible ethnonyms.

First of all, a name for Latvians in German *Lette* should be mentioned, and it has been established in such house names as *Alt Lette* and *Neu Lette*. Components of word groups with *alt* and *neu*, namely, *old* and *new* are traditionally used in the designation of house names, and they usually indicate a name, that is, the sequence of house building. The German form

of this name is unorthodox and mostly encountered in the church metrics books in the parish up to 1858. The rest of the house names or their components in the same parish were written down in the Latvian spelling of the corresponding age, and it was based on the German spelling tradition. *Lette*, namely, *the Latvian* (together with the name *Latgalians*) has been a designation for the Latgalians living in the eastern part of the present territory of Latvia at least since the 12th century; *Lette* was used in the Chronicle of Henry<sup>1</sup> (*Heinrici Chronicon* 1993) describing the events in the territory of Latvia in the 12th and 13th centuries, and even more frequently in the Rhyme Chronicle (*Livländische Reimchronik* 1998) dedicated to the events of the 13th and 14th centuries. For example, in the Chronicle of Henry one can read a very important sentence – *De conspiratione Ruthenorum cum Lyvonibus et Lettis contra Rigenses. ..diffusi Lyvones ac Lethos, qui proprie dicuntur Lethigalli..* ‘About the conspiracy of Russians and their allies – the Livs and the Letts against the inhabitants of Riga. ..called upon the Livs and Letts that are truly referred to as Latgalians’ (*Heinrici Chronicon* 1993: 84-85). In the 19th century when the aforementioned house names appear, the word *Latvian* was used to refer to all those living in the territory of Latvia. Unfortunately, the analysis of the rest of the house names of the Beļava private mansion (*Kortenhof*) does not allow to know whether in all four church metrics books the names *Alt Lette* and *Neu Lette* were used in German daily. Also, in the 19th century church metrics books it was not possible to find a house name containing the component *Lette*, but several times a house name *Jaun Zierul* was written down as *Neu Zierul*. It is likely that a house name containing the word *Lette* is a name given by a mansion landlord to a kin with a positive attitude to Latvians.

In the house names of the 19th century, several names for the Baltic tribes were used. The word *Selian* appears in three house names *Seelisch Robeschneek*, *Sehlich Robeschneek*<sup>2</sup> (1816); *Sehlet*, *Sehlich*. All these house names were established in the territory where the Selian subdialects of the High Latvian (*augšzemnieku*) dialect in the Vidzeme region are used. Although the historical sources usually mention that the Selians lived on the left bank of the river Daugava in the present territory of Latvia and Lithuania in the 14th and 15th centuries, a language fact, for instance, a rising intonation considered to be characteristic of the Selian speech is also used on the right bank of the river Daugava from where the aforementioned house names have been written down. The Selians were mentioned as one of the Baltic peoples in Livonian Chronicle of Henry, for example, *De obsidione castri Selonum* ‘About the siege of the Selian castle’ (*Heinrici Chronicon* 1993: 106-107). It is possible that these house names indicate the Selians’ descendants who may have lived in these houses at the beginning of the 19th century.

The second name of a Baltic tribe mentioned in several house names all across the Vidzeme region is the name of the Couronians – *Jaun Kurseet* (1834), *Wezz Kurseet* (1834), *Kursen*, *Kurset Land*, *Kurset*, *Kursit*. The Couronians were a Baltic people who lived in the west of the present territory of Latvia – the Courland (Kurzeme) and in northwest Lithuania. The Couronians spoke the Couronian language. It is assumed that the Couronian language disappeared in the 14th and 15th centuries. In describing his trip from 1399-1450, Guillebert de Lannoy describes the Couronians in ‘Voyages et ambassades de messir Guillebert de

<sup>1</sup> *Heinrici Chronicon* – Latin; *Chronicle of Henry* – English.

<sup>2</sup> The year after the house name is indicated in cases when the materials of the 1826 population registers (the so-called ‘soul’ registers) cannot be accessed, or house name forms differ from the 1826 version.

Lannoy' (Lannoy 1840: 17). The massive migration of the Couronians to certain regions in Vidzeme is mentioned by a Latvian linguist Jānis Endzelīns (Endzelīns 1923: 5-7). However, the spread of said house names does not include those in Vidzeme mentioned as Couronians' new places of residence. It is possible that in houses, which contain the root *kurs-*, namely, *kurš-*, lived those who arrived from Courland, and they might have been the descendants of the Livs. The materials of the plough revision from 1638 show arrivals from the Courland are quite numerous (Dunsdorfs 1938-1941; see also Ancītis and Jansons 1963: 49-50, 66-67).

The name of the Lithuanians in house names appears even more frequently. House names with a component *leitis* are widespread and the form was widely used to designate the Lithuanians as late as in the first half of the 20th century, for example, *Kaln Leisch*, *Leies Leisch*, *Leijse*, *Leisch*, *Leische Appenas*, *Leische Kaln*, *Leiskalln jetzt Rujen*, *Leiskallne*, *Leiskalne*, *Leischmarte*, *Leuschan* (1816), *Leischjahn* (1834), *Leite Behrseleit / Behrseleite / Behrelei*, *Leite*. In a number of house names one can recognize the contemporary form of the Latvian language – *lietuvietis*, for example, *Letowet*, *Letuwit Appenas*, *Kalne Letewesch*, *Leies Letawesch*. The aforementioned house names in the first half of the 19th century are popular in the whole territory of Vidzeme, but mostly in the north of Vidzeme along the border with Estonia.

The materials of plough revision show that many inhabitants of Vidzeme referred to themselves as Lithuanians, even those living close to Estonia (Dunsdorfs 1938-1941). Other toponyms in the whole territory of Vidzeme indicate the presence of Lithuanians. It is highly possible that those living in houses with the names containing *leiš-* had an affinity with the Lithuanians.

Only two house names contain the root *prus*, namely, *prūš-*, for example, *Prus* and *Prusche*. The name Prussian in the Latvian language is not unequivocal even as an ethnonym. *Prussian* is, first of all, a general designation for the small peoples or tribes of the West Balts – the Sambians, Natangians, Bartians, Nadruvians, Warmians, Pomesanians, and Pogesanians. In the history books, they are also referred to as the Old Prussians (about Prussians in Vidzeme see Ancītis and Jansons 1963: 47). The Old Prussians lived in the territory of Prussia (in Russia's Kalingrad region, in Poland's Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship, and Lithuania's Rusnė Island). They were subjugated during the Northern Crusades and fully assimilated by the 18th century. Secondly, during the Early and Late modern periods, the name *prūši* was used to designate the Prussian kingdoms, later on – the inhabitants of the German provinces speaking a peculiar dialect and with different cultural and mental features. Thirdly, the appellative *prusaks* in many subdialects of the Latvian language is also *prūsis*. Cockroaches (*Blattaria* or *Blattodea*) belong to the insect class and they are a species of the Neoptera infraclass. No evidence shows that these insects had lived in Latvian houses by the second half of the 19th century, whereas the 20th century materials compiled from various subdialects show this fact to be of a frequent occurrence (see, for example, Kagaine 1983: 138). Without additional studies the two mentioned ethnonyms with a root *prūš-* can hardly be admitted as house names of the ethnonymic origin. Their location in the north of Latvia at the town of Valmiera does not confirm their ethnonymic origin.

The second group of house names contains designations for Finno-Ugric peoples. Fifteen house names are connected with the Estonian name, for example, *Iggaun* (1816), *Iggaun*, *Kalne Iggaun*, *Leies Iggaun*, *Struppe Iggaun*, *Iggaun Jehk*, *Iggaun Linning*. The

Estonians live in the northeastern part of Europe and they speak the Estonian language. The Estonian language belongs to the Finno-Ugric language group of the Baltic branch. The Estonians have referred to themselves as *eesti* since the awakening of the national consciousness in the 19th century. In Latvian, the name of the country *Igaunija* is derived from the old Estonian area – *Ugaunia* (the south part of Estonia) that was the neighbouring country of the old Tālava (one of the areas populated by the Latgalian). The name of the area *Ugaunia* was mentioned in the Chronicle by Henry, for example, *De bonis mercatorum ab Ugaunensibus quondam direptis* ‘About the merchants’ property once stolen by Ugaunians’ (*Heinrici Chronicon* 1993: 108-109), *nuncios suos ad Estones in Unganiam* ‘sent his messengers to Ugaunian Estonians’ (*Heinrici Chronicon* 1993: 118-119). As we can see in the second example, in Latin *igauņi* (Estonians) are referred to as *Estones*, but the inhabitants of the area *Ugaunija* – *Ugaunes* or *Unganes*.

The Latvians of Vidzeme have always had close contacts with the Estonians. After the serfdom was banned and particularly after 1860, Estonian peasants bought land in the present territory of Latvia, and later on they moved to Rīga, Valka, Valmiera, and other towns. A larger number of Estonians lived in the north of Latvia in the vicinity of Valka and Valmiera; however, Estonians were also present in the vicinities of Alūksne and Gulbene where they were referred to as *leivi*. With a few exceptions, house names with an ethnonym *igaunis* are absent in those regions where a bigger proportion of Estonians could be expected. It is possible that a house name with an ethnonym *igaunis* was chosen in those areas where Estonians were very few, and this fact is consistent with the practice of naming houses – to make them unique and individual. Without doubt we can assert that all the house names with the root *igaun-* are of ethnonymic semantics, namely, at the moment of giving of the house name Estonians lived there.

Practically in the whole territory of Vidzeme in 1826 there were house names with ethnonyms *lībietis* or *līvs*.

Such house names were mentioned 34 times altogether in the church metrics books in 1826, for example, those with an ethnonym *lībieši* are *Zukes Libesch*, *Jaun Libesch* (1811), *Jaun Liebesch*, *Kallne Lihbet*, *Kalne Libesch*, *Kalne Liebeet*, *Kalne Liebet Jahn*, *Kalne Liebet Mattis jetzt Jahn*, *L. Liebet Peter jetzt Jahn*, *Leies Leebet*, *Leijes Lihbet*, *Wetz Libesch* (1811), *Wetz Liebesch*, *Liban*, *Libesch*, *Liebeht*, *Liebet*, *Liebet Jaecob* (1816), *Liebet Jurre* (1816), *Lihbasch*, *Liebet Mik*, *Liebet Sander* (1816), *Lihbeet*, *Lihbet*, *Lihbets Krug*, *Lihbez*, but with an ethnonym *līvs* – *Lihwe*, *Liwe*, *Liewe*.

The number of house names with ethnonyms *lībietis* and *līvs* is evident. The Livs are a Baltic Finnish people living in the territory of Latvia, and they speak the language of the Finno-Ugric group. (The special issue of the *Journal of Estonian and Finno-Ugric Linguistics* (ESUKA – JEFUL 2014) is dedicated to the Livonian language.) The ancestors of the Livs, the Finno-Ugric tribes, arrived in Kurzeme and Vidzeme from the north-east in about 2500BC and settled in the free barren territories along the seashore and the basin of the river Gauja unoccupied by local farmers. In the 11th century after lost wars, the Livs together with the Couronians moved from *Vanema*, that is, the old lands across the Gulf of Riga to the West coast of Vidzeme and also further to the east inland of the western part of the Gauja and the Daugava basins. Due to various historically political and economic reasons, the Latgalian and the Couronian of the inland gradually assimilated the Livs along the seashore

and the lower reaches of the rivers Daugava and Gauja from the 13th century onwards. Thus the Livs gradually became consolidated with the Latvian people. In the 20th century the territory populated by the Livs shrunk to the width of several kilometers and the length of 60 kilometres of the land strip on the coastline of north Kurzeme. The Livs of north Kurzeme referred to themselves as *jūrmalnieki* (*rāndalist*, seaside inhabitants), and their language as *rāndakēļ* (the language of the seaside). They were mentioned in written sources for the first time in the Viking sagas of the 11th century and in Russian chronicles. It should also be mentioned that the first lines of Chronicle of Henry mention the Livs, for example, *cui Lyvones adhuc pagani tribute solvebant* ‘whom the Livs, who were pagans, paid tribute – duties in kind’ (*Heinrici Chronicon* 1993: 48-49), *Interim suscipiende fidei sinceritas a Lyvonibus confirmatur secundo* ‘Among other things the Livs confirmed their strong desire to accept the Christian faith’ (*Heinrici Chronicon* 1993: 48-49).

It might be assumed that all the mentioned house names have a link with the designation of the ethnos – the Livs. Despite the fact that the residents of these houses spoke Latvian, more specifically, one of its subdialects, they were aware of their origin as Livs. There is a dispute over house names with a root *līv-*. Taking into consideration the location of these houses, the territory of the *Leivi*, they are related to the Estonian ancestors who moved to Latvia. The materials from the church metrics books of 1826 do not confirm this assumption because the long vowel *ī* according to the German pattern is written as *ie*. With an exception in the deep Latgalian subdialects of the High Latvian (Augšzemnieku) dialect, two names with a root *līv-* were established, the diphthong *ei* corresponds to the long vowel *ī* in the Latvian language. However, a more in-depth explanation should account for this fact. Besides, it seems that only those Estonian ancestors who moved to the territory of Latvia in the second half of the 19th century are referred to as *leivi*.

Only one house name relates to the Karelians in the three house names *Kareel* (1816) in the middle of Vidzeme. The Karelians are a Finno-Ugric people who reside in the north west of Russia, and they speak a Baltic Finnish language of the Finno-Ugric branch. For centuries, Karelia has been the object of contention among Sweden, Finland, and Russia. Nowadays, Karelia is one of the republics of the Russian Federation. It borders on the southwestern and southern parts of the Leningrad Oblast (Region), the southern and southeastern regions of Vologda, the southeastern and eastern regions of Arkhangelsk, the eastern part of the White Sea, the northern region of Murmansk, and also in the West of Finland.

It is not very likely that a Karelian family could have moved to Vidzeme at the beginning of the 19th century.

It is possible that the house names in Vidzeme have retained an ancient Finno-Ugric people's name – the Votes who were referred to as the small Russians (*krieviņi*) in the Latvian language. A formal diminutive *krieviņi* was established in 24 names – *Brenz Krewin*, *Jaun Krewing*, *Kalne Kreewiņ*, *Leies Kreewiņ*, *Muisch Kreewing*, *Wetz Krewing*, *Matsch Kreewing/ Matsch Kreewing*, *Kreewin*, *Kreewing*, *Kreewiņ*, *Krewing*. These names are concentrated in two vertical belts; one of them begins in the northeast of Vidzeme and moves southwards up to the Daugava.

The Votes are a small Finno-Ugric people who live in the southwest of the present Leningrad Oblast (Region), and they speak a Baltic Finnish language of the Finno-Ugric

branch. The small Russians, as they were referred to in Latvian, were the descendants of about 3000 Votes who were taken to Zemgale after the inroad to Novgorod Land by the Master of the Livonian Order Heinrich Vinke von Overberg, and their skills were used to build the Bauska Castle (1447). The castle is similar to the one of Koporje and other stone castles in Novgorod (Russia).

Having built the fortress, the Votes were settled by the Order in the vicinity of Bauska, sparsely populated and destroyed in the wars with the Lithuanians. Research concerning 'krieviņi' and their language has been summed up in Eberhard Winkler's *Krewinsch* (Winkler 1997).

In written sources, the small Russians have been mentioned by Paul Einhorn in *Reformatio gentis Letticae in Ducatu Curlandiae* (Einhorn 1636) and *Historia Lettica* (Einhorn 1649), for example,

*ift noch ein frembd Volck hie im Lande/ die Krewingen oder Reuffische Bawren genandt/ vnd wohnen dieselben allein im Baußkerischen Gebiete an der Littawifchen Grentze .. wann fie unter fich selbst reden/ fo reden fie Eftnifch*

'in this this country there is yet another foreign folk called 'krieviņi' (*die Krewingen* in German of the 17th century) or Russian peasants, and they live only in the area of Bauska near the Lithuanian border .. when they address each other they speak Estonian' (Einhorn 1636: 6a-6b).

In the Duke's country estates of Kurzeme and Zemgale near Bauska in 1650, three Latvian and two small Russian peasants-freeholders were mentioned, and they lived in the Krieviņi parish land.

Also, in the German language of the parish territory in 1751, the name *Krewische Wacke* appears, and this shows that the name *krieviņi* was given by the inhabitants of the parish territory themselves.

In Vidzeme, the aforementioned house names with the name indicating the descendants of the Votes, the small Russians, are not interconnected, but a Latvian ethnographer Saulvedis Cimermanis has repeatedly expressed an assumption on the basis of the language material that the small Russians on the way to Bauska in the south of Latvia from the vicinity of the present Leningrad Oblast have either escaped or, for any other reasons, stayed in Vidzeme. The belt which crosses Latvia from the northeast Vidzeme is of particular interest. However, all the mentioned house names cannot be linked with the Votes, the small Russians, because of homonymous diminutives, namely, an ethnonym *krieviņi* corresponds to the diminutive of the ethnonym *krievs*.

The third group of ethnonyms consists of the names of the Slavic peoples. First of all, we should consider the name of a Slavic people – *krievs*. Altogether 15 names including their derivatives were established – *Ahres Krew*, *PeterKreewe*, *Kreewe*, *Krewe Kaln*, *Kreewuppe*, *Krewleij*, *Krewupp*, *Leel Meschkreew*, *Mas Meschkreew*, *K. Kreewan*, *L. Kreewan*, *Kreewan*, *Kriwan*, *Kalne Krewel*, *Leies Krewel*. All these names are concentrated in the middle of Vidzeme; no house name has been noted in the northwest of Vidzeme. The Russians are an East Slavic group who speak the Russian language of the Indo-European language group. The

old Russian chronicles show that the contacts with the Russians of the present territory of Latvia existed long ago. The first information about a bigger Old Russian community, of at least several hundreds, in the present territory of Latvia dates back from the 15th century when hundreds of merchants and craftsmen from Polotsk and Vitebsk travelled by barges and rafts down the river Daugava every summer and back in autumn. A big Russian migration began after the Nikon's reform of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1667 when many escaped from persecutions of the tsarist Russia, and a noteworthy number of Old Believers settled in Latgale, Selia, and Riga (about old Believers in Latvia see, for example, Podmazovs 2001). Certainly, the number of Russians increased after the occupation of Latvia in the 20th century, but these events cannot be related to the toponyms of the older period.

It is possible that the house names of a root *kriev-*, with an exception of the formal diminutive *krieviņi*, mentioned in the church metrics books of 1826 are directly linked to the ethnonym. A person being able to speak Russian in the German environment of those days might also be referred to as a Russian. We should not exclude the fact that at least part of the diminutives with a lexeme *krieviņi* refers to the East Slavic people although house names with ethno-diminutives are practically absent.

An ethnonym *polis* can be linked to the house name *Pohle* established in two cases in the middle of Vidzeme. The small number of house names with an ethnonym *polis* is surprising given the fact that Vidzeme was under the Polish rule from 1561–1629. Besides, it is not altogether clear whether the ethnonym *polis* is the basis of a house name because in Latvian an appellative *pole* also has a meaning of 'a cow without horns'.

In Vidzeme, there is a number of names with a root *slav-* / *slāv-* that can relate to ethnonyms, for example, *Slahwit*, *Kalna slawit*, *Kalne Slavit*, *Leies Slavit*, *Slawiht*, *Slawiet*, *Leel Slawehk* (1834), *Mas Slawehk* (1834), *Mas Slawek* (1834), *Slaweck*, *Slawek*, *Groht Pauniņ jetzt Slawehk*, *Slawesch*, *Slawischan* (1816), *Leel Slawezen*, *Slawehl*.

The Slavs are not a concrete name for a people, in Latvian the name designates a people belonging to the Indo-Europeans speaking a Slavic language. This generalized designation makes one doubt the fact that those house names belong to the semantic group of ethnonyms. Besides, Latvian contains appellatives of different word classes with a root *slav-*, and if we consider the aforementioned examples only one house name of a root *slāv-* with a long vowel *ā* was established. If we analyze appellatives of a root *slav*, the noun *slava*, the adjective *slavens*, and the verb *slavēt* should be mentioned. For this reason, the house names might have one of these appellatives.

Separate house names can also be connected with other ethnonyms, for example, on the bank of the Daugava three houses were named *Swedre* (1816), and it is possible to link it to the ethnonym *zviedrs* – a designation for the Swedish nation in the Latvian language.

There are also two exoticisms in the house names of Vidzeme. They are *Turzinge* (1816) in the middle of Vidzeme, and *Greeke*, *Greke*, *Grieken Krug* around Vidzeme. The first house name is connected with an ethnonym *turks*, the rest – with an ethnonym *griekis*. It is unlikely that the representatives of the distant peoples lived in Latvia during the 18th and 19th centuries; however, they were well-known for their distinct national characteristics. For example, Johann Christoph Brotze in his drawing albums 'Sammlung verschiedner Liefländischer Monumente...' included the pictures of Greek travelers, for example, here a Greek woman from Morea is depicted, who in Riga in 1785 asks for support of her family to

buy them out of the Turkish captivity (Broce 1992: 144-145). It is possible that a resident of a corresponding house had a tradition to wear specific garments, for example, a head-dress bearing a resemblance to Turks' attire. The house names with a root *griek-*, namely, *griek-* can relate to another semantic group – the house names with the semantics of flora connected with the grain of *griķi* 'buckwheat'.

Before the abolishing of serfdom in 1819, house names in Vidzeme had a wide use of not only the names of the ancient Baltic tribes, but also the names of separate Slavic peoples – the Russians and the Poles. Among the potential nomination subjects, there are also some exoticisms. In order to establish links between a concrete house name with an ethnonym, more in-depth studies on the origin of house names and residents' ethnic background should be done.

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